

Advent 1C

Nov. 29th, 2009

Luke 25

Waiting with the Tenacity of Hope.

(About 30 seconds of unexpected silence begins the sermon)

Time is an elusive concept. The anxiety caused by thirty seconds of unexpected silence overpowers our internal clock and *s t r e t c h e s* seconds into minutes. At other moments, we are so immersed in what we are doing that time becomes almost irrelevant. We call those moments *play*. They are little glimpses of eternity in a world bound by time and the inevitable waiting that comes with it.

Waiting is something that most of us have a hard time doing. **What exactly are we waiting for anyway?** The children shared some of the things they were waiting for, I wonder if we might be able to do the same. What are some of the things we are waiting for? (..... a good deal, something to be fixed, life to be more normal, Christmas, healing, promises, a phone call, help, God, rest, an explanation, to die, to go home, to eat, for winter to be over, at nighttime we wait for light.)

The season of Advent gives us an opportunity to consider what it means to wait. In some ways, our **whole lives might be described as *waiting***. We are creatures who have the ability to think about a future that has not yet happened. There is a **space that exists between 'now' and 'then'** that is filled with **waiting** for that thing to happen. Sometimes our wait is short but at other times, our wait is long, spanning months or years or even generations.

The gospels according to Matthew, Mark, and Luke, all contain words from Jesus dealing with the problem of "waiting". The images and language used in these texts are strange and perhaps

unsettling to modern ears but their basic purpose is to bring hope by promising an end to suffering and a reordering of the political and social powers that be. Luke's community has experienced the reconciliation, peace, and joy of believing that God really does love them and yet they cannot escape the threatening realities of a violent and unjust world. Many people, longing for an end to the suffering they witnessed and experienced, hoped for the day the ancient prophets had long foretold – a day when justice and righteousness rule the land. It would be the end of the world as we know it. Some thought that day was coming very soon, others wondered if it was coming at all.

Today, we still look for the *end of the world as we know it*, but too often our waiting is filled with fear. Just watch the History Channel during “Doomsday Week” or read some of the twisted theology in the “Left Behind” books. But according to Luke, and to the rest of the Bible, the day we so easily fear is a day of redemption. It is a time when all things will be made right and good and true. The only things destroyed are death and all its associates. It is a day we long for, it is a time we wait for. But when will it ever get here? How long, oh Lord? How long?

When I was farming, Shelli used to ask me when I might be home or how long a certain thing might take. I would think for a while and tell her, for example, “Oh I'll be home about 6:30.” Then she would always ask for a little clarification, “Is that real time or *Timmy Time*?” Timmy time usually lasted a bit longer than real time.

God's time is not the same as our time. God's purpose employs wisdom unknown to us. We are given signs to watch for but they are not the signs of doom and gloom but the signs of new life. Look at the trees, Jesus says. Do you see them pregnant with buds? That is the sign that the new life of spring is about to push the cold bleakness of winter away. So it will be with the coming kingdom of God. Look for the life that is happening all around. Take it in, savor it, smell it, inhale it into every cell in your body. Don't waste a single minute worrying about unimportant things. Life is too short for that. Love instead. Swim upstream. Be irrationally hopeful – for hope is the audacious capacity to live believing there is a better future that awaits us.

When will that future come? We don't know but **we live trusting that (in a very real way) the day is already here.** The *audacious* hope we have for God's good future is not a

momentary mountaintop experience. It is a *tenacious* appeal to the promise that no matter what happens, God is present with us, working all things together for good. **We live as if our waiting is over.** That is what Paul means when he says “abound in love for one another and for all.” That’s what Jesus means he urges us to be alert and on guard and not distracted with worries that turn us away from the life God intends. We live with a sense of urgency, of expectation that any day, in fact everyday, is a day when Jesus comes into the world.

That kind of understanding totally transforms our waiting. It is no longer wasted time, waiting for something better to come along. Instead, it is an **active** time, a time to live out the future now, a time to bring healing and comfort to a sick and hurting world.

What does it look like to wait with the tenacity of hope – to stop being distracted by who will be *Left Behind*, or what will happen in 2012? What does it look like to live with the persistent conviction that God has already arrived in this world? Perhaps it is best pictured by a person who puts the needs of someone else ahead of his/her own - a person who sees waiting as an opportunity to get busy.

When I was a field scout, I used to occasionally run into the fuel man refilling the tank by the irrigation motor. One time I was surprised to find that while the man was waiting for the fuel to fill the tank, he was cutting down shattercane stalks with his pocketknife. Now there was a lot of shattercane around, so much that he barely made a dent with his attempts. So I asked him why he was working so hard when he could just be waiting. “Well the can is supposed to be here and I might as well do **something** while I wait”. There is a lot of power in that simple answer.

Waiting can indeed be a gift. It can be a gift to us because it gives us the time and opportunity to stop and consider what we are doing and why. It can be an opportunity where we offer a glimpse of the kingdom to someone else. God has come into the history of the world to save us. God continues to come to us again and again through community, Word, and Sacrament. And when that last day comes, it will be a day of planting, a day of new life springing up from the soil and our waiting for the promised future will be over.